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ABSTRACT

The process by which people construct and reconstruct their identities when they face cultural changes resulting from education, learning, or moving to another culture was examined through a study of narratives from immigrants to Sweden and students who were in the process of learning to become researchers at a well-established university, as well as through examination of the pertinent literature. The role of biographical learning in individuals' construction and reconstruct of their identity was examined against the backdrop of George Herbert Mead's theories of intersubjectivity and self, language, and temporality. The effect that learning a foreign language or language of another social or professional group has on adult immigrants' construction and reconstruction of their identity and the process by which young researchers become academics were explored in detail. Special attention was paid to the process of young researchers' socialization to the role of member of a research community and to gender differences in the research community. The study confirmed that biographies are useful and informative material that can give insights into how identities are shaped and altered. The study also confirmed the possibility of having several different identities at the same time and coping with them accordingly in different social situations. (Contains 27 references.) (MN)

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Construction and Reconstruction of Identity through Biographical Learning. The Role of Language and Culture.

Paper presented at the ESREA Biography and Life History Network seminar on European perspectives on life history research: theory and practice of biographical narratives, Geneva 7th to 10th of March 2002

> *All immigrants and exiles know the peculiar restlessness of an imagination that can never again have faith in its own absoluteness.*
>
> Ewa Hoffman

By meeting and talking to adults in different circumstances, and over cultural and national borders, in everyday life encounters, in teaching and researching, I experienced and heard, too often, statements that deal emotionally and cognitively with the issues of cultural changes where language, class and gender are involved. The awareness of belonging or not belonging to the certain social strata, national group or gender, and the problems one faces while dealing with one's identity is often stated and commented upon in the stories people tell. One interesting example comes from my Japanese student who interviewed mature students at the Stockholm University who came there through Folk High School qualification/prerequisite[1]. She was surprised that in the opening of their stories students first mentioned their own social class affiliation. She wondered that they were aware of that, and that was an important issue for them, whereas my student believed that the Swedish society is equalised and classless.

What is more, we often hear stories people tell about commuting between cultures, e.g. between an original culture they once belonged to and the newly acquired culture they live in now. This awareness comes often through biographical learning, as in the case of my students - folk high school teachers - who through telling and analysing their life histories discovered their 'true' motivation for becoming folk high school teachers. The difficulties to feel well in the old culture they have left, and not yet feeling really affiliated with the new one, trigger the decision to find a place in between, in this case in folk high school. They wanted to be in a place in which they could feel familiar, secure and safe culturally and socially as well as able to reconstruct their own identity in the community of people in a similar situation bearing cultural codes that they understood and felt well. Ewa Hoffman's story is a good example of

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[1] These students lack studentexamen (A-level) which is a prerequisite to apply for higher education entrance. Instead they apply on the basis of FHS's qualification and are admitted through FHS's quota.

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what is going on while being between cultures trying to adjust to a new one and forgetting the old one:

> I am pregnant with the images of Poland, pregnant and sick....The largest presence within me is the welling up of absence, of what I have lost. This pregnancy is also a phantom pain. (...) Not everything there is old-fashioned, not everything here better! But everyone encourages me to forget what I left behind. (Hoffman 1989, 115) After a while, I begin to push the images of memory down, away from consciousness, below emotion (ibid. 116).

She emigrated as a teenager with her family from Poland to Canada, and writes about the process of being and becoming in a new culture in the book with the title very much up to the point: *Lost in Translation*.

Moving to another culture in connection with immigration often triggers a culture shock, and its strength depends on how distant a culture of a newcomer is to the one s/he has left. Usually a person is overwhelmed by the mass of goods, by impressions, sounds, technology etc., but most of all by different cultural, social and political values, norms and habits. Difficulties to deal with them can paralyse, isolate a person and develop different strategies. S/he can look for familiarity by staying within the original group, or by just doing the opposite i.e. withdrawing. This often contributes to not being able to learn a new language (see Bron 1999), appreciating own culture/or hating it, making continuous comparisons between new and old, looking for familiar food and symbols, etc. that belonged to one's own culture. Sometimes it helps to deliberately learn the language, cultural codes connected to it and having as a goal to become one of the culture: integrating or assimilating (see Boski 1992; Malewaka-Peyre 1992; Bourgeois 2000). Even research students can face culture shock when the style of academic work differs from that what they knew or were used to. Here is the statement from Johanna who came to Sweden from the US, daughter of the Swedish professor, to start her PhD studies. She begun in the middle of the 70s, and by the beginning of the 90s she still had not finished her thesis. She experienced difficulties with her writing, and she recalls how her Swedish husband influenced her too much.

> And he wanted to put me in his form, a very impersonal way to write. What is more, I kept writing in Swedish, now I write in English, and he corrected my Swedish in such way that it became his language and not my, and this contributed also, I think, that I lost some self-confidence. It was not me who talked, but someone else, and I didn't fit to this form. This was long time ago that I thought about it, but I think one more thing made it more difficult for me partly as I come from Anglo-Saxon education. I took my undergraduate studies in USA, so I didn't study B or C (courses) here, and I didn't write any essays here. To come from an Anglo-Saxon tradition means that we partly have another style of writing, not at all this terrible ... yes, you know, aim, research background, this very formal form for all that one used to have here. And than we don't have the same ... criticism of sources at all in USA

> and partly a different attitude to how one writes history, that it can be more narrative. And then to come here and enter a nearly natural sciences pattern that they used while writing theses during the 70ties, combined with the Marx's analytical approach. And the descriptive was not allowed, it should be this theoretical anchoring all the time. It was very difficult for me to jump from the one tradition to the other, to this form one used here very much. This didn't suite me. I had very hard to stow myself in this form. I think this is partly such things ... it is a culture shock, scientific culture shock ... A descriptive way to write, that it is not suitable, this also, so to speak, influence one's own self-confidence ... that one not really try, and then will be criticise by people whom one's doesn't think understand (Johanna):

Encounters with changes and new culture especially trigger questions about belonging and about self in connection to others and in the context one is in. They are by no means characteristic for newcomers to the culture(s) or sub-cultures. Though, they are typical for immigrants but also characterise those who are moving within cultures, e.g. becoming aware of differences between social classes, culture codes and cultures connected to them. The latter happens very often among the new generation, among those who migrated from the countryside to big cities, and those who move up through education on the social ladder to new sub-cultures (see Bertaux-Wiame 1981).

Drawing on H. G. Mead's theory of intersubjectivity and his way of approaching the issue of language I want to develop some understanding of how people construct and reconstruct their identities when they face cultural changes affected by education, learning, and moving to another culture. Language as well as culture and its values, believes, speech patterns, and forms of understanding are not static phenomena, but change in everyday life while interacting in different milieus, contexts, and situations, as well as at work. Biographical learning is crucial for these processes, especially when we face new tasks, experiences, and are reflectively involved to deal with these issues (Bron 2001). The main question, thus, will be how learning contributes to reflection over one's own roles, identities, etc. as well as (re)construction of identity(ies).

The paper is based on diverse empirical material like narratives from immigrants to Sweden as well as from research students in one of the well-established universities. In both examples the role of values and emotions is crucial, thus not only a rational, cognitive awareness of change. For immigrants the issue of finding one's own place in the new culture and country will be addressed, where language and culture play a significant role. In the last case two issues of importance will be dealt with: becoming a member of the research community at Uppsala University, and becoming aware of the gender differences by being a

female or a male researcher. Again the role of language and specific culture will be addressed[2].

Constructing and Reconstructing Identity

Dealing with one's own identity or identities is the existential issue we all are engaged in. Humans always asked themselves questions about who they are and why there are, how they become and what they are and what their future is, mostly or especially in situations which were seriously important, dangerous or strange, in times of crisis, suffering, in flux and changes. Reflective individuals ask themselves such question, and these questions are especially possible to ask because of our ability to narrate about one's own life, and to learn from our biographies. Bruner (1990) points to the narrative as Óone of the most ubiquitous and powerful discourses" in human communication. ÓNarrative structure is even inherent in the praxis of social interaction before it achieves linguistic expression" (ibid. 77). We socialised in story telling in our early lives, and Ófour grammatical/lexical/prosodic features ... provide the child with an abundant and early armament of narrative tools" (ibid. 79). Bruner's argument is that

> while we have an Óinnate" and primitive predisposition to narrative organization that allows us quickly and easily to comprehend and use it, the culture soon equips us with new powers of narration through its tool kit and through the traditions of telling and interpreting in which we soon come to participate (ibid. 80).

This is a sort of capital, a social capital we bring with us, and use when we are changing our place of belonging. Being aware of it and making use of it, or not, can help us to understand ourselves but also the others. Chambers (1994) underlines that:

> Travel, migration and movement invariably bring us up against the limits of our inheritance. We may choose to withdraw from this impact and only select a confirmation of our initial views. In this case whatever lies on other side remains in the shadows, in obscurity (Chambers 1994, 115).

For we are not a finished product with a fixed identity, but always in becoming, and that is why we are able to change, construct re-construct our identity:

> The awareness of the complex and constructed nature of our identities offers a key that opens us up to other possibilities: to recognise in our story other stories, to discover in the apparent completeness of the modern individual the incoherence, the estrangement, the gap opened up by the stranger, that subverts it and forces us to acknowledge the question: the stranger in ourselves. ... In that passage, and the sense

[2] Since 1986 I have been involved in collecting life stories from different groups of people in Sweden (Polish immigrants, PhD students, non-traditional students in higher education) (Bron 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 1999, 2000, Bron and West 2000). Even if this range of people seems very different, nevertheless there are many commonalties they share with each other.

> of place and belonging that we construct there, our individual stories, our unconscious drives and desires, acquire a form that is always contingent, in transit, without a goal, without an end (Chambers 1994, 25).

One of the findings from the analysis of various live histories is that we construct and reconstruct or identity through biographical learning. Theoretical support for this result we can find in H. G. Mead's theory on intersubjectivity, his theory of self, language and temporality. The support, assistance or confirmations for these results we can even notice in Bourdieu's theory on habitus, culture and language (Bourdieu 1977).

Theory of Language

For Mead language is inseparably connected with the emergence of the self and meaning. In the ongoing social act characterised by the 'conversation of gestures' language, thought, and action are inseparably intertwined write Rosenthal and Bourgeois (1991, 136). In language, a purely social process is occurring as language develops out of gestures i.e. both verbal and non-verbal, and includes awareness of meaning. It is much broader than speech, as it starts to grow from the gestures already when we were children and before we can even articulate them in any speech. These are significant gestures, but the vocal gestures have the most importance, as it is from them that language develops (Rosenthal, Bourgeois 1991, 138). Communication with each other is possible, according to Mead, because we share the same meaning of what we want to say within the group to which we belong and address ourselves. It is through taking the attitudes of the others that the special character of human intelligence is formed. But this has a profound consequence for learning the language of a group to which we belong. Usually it is a very natural process when we learn a mother tongue. As Bruner (1990) writes

> Children ... are predisposed naturally and by circumstances to start their narrative careers in that spirit. And we equip them with models and procedural tool kits for perfecting those skills. Without those skills we could never endure the conflicts and contradictions that social life generates. We would become unfit for the life of culture (ibid. 97).

But this processes gets more complicated when we learn a foreign language or language of another social or professional group, while being adults. Ewa Hoffman (1989) writes about her experience:

> I learn English through writing, and, in turn, writing gives me a written self. Refracted through the double distance of English and writing, this self–my English self–becomes oddly objective; more than anything, it perceives. (...) This language is beginning to invent another me. However, I discover something odd. It seems that when I write (or, for that matter, think) in English, I am unable to use the word 'I'. I

> do not go as far as the schizophrenic Óshe"–but I am driven, as by compulsion, to the double, the Siamese-twin 'you'. (Hoffman 121)
> My voice is doing funny things. It does not seem to emerge from the same part of my body as before. It comes out from somewhere in my throat, tight, thin, and mat–a voice without the modulations, dips, and rises that it had before, when it went from stomach all the way through my head. There is, of course, the constraint and the self-consciousness of an accent that I hear but cannot control. (122).

This is exactly the feeling of how the language is changing one's own identity, and not only the mind but very much the body.

Marianne Horsdal (2001) points towards narrative competence as crucial for the interaction with others and our selves. Such skills we get early, and we use them while socialising within culture and language in a natural way. It is possible to consciously train them. The question however appears if they are enough when we move to another culture, in other words are they culturally bound? Ewa Hoffman, while writing about difficulties of learning a language stresses that:

> Like any disability, this one has produced its own compensatory mechanisms, and my mind, relatively deprived of words, has become a deft instrument of abstraction. In my head, there is on ongoing, daily monologue to distract me, no layers of verbal filigree to peel away before the skeleton of an argument can become clear (Hoffman 1989, 180).

At the same time she points to learning first an abstract language, while being still ignorant in the everyday, sort of natural language one gets as a child without so much effort.

> I soak in the academic vocabulary of the time with an almost suspicious facility; for me, this is an elementary rather than an advanced language, a language I learn while I'm still in my English childhood (Hoffman 1989, 181).

Immigrants take the new language not only as means of survival, but as an important step to master their being, to become anew, to reconstruct their identities. ÓIt's as important to me to speak well as to play a piece of music without mistakes" stresses Hoffman (1989, 123). Most immigrants want to achieve perfection in their new language. They will be afraid to speak or write before they fulfil this goal. The desire to be perfect is very much related to the education level. The higher the level of education the more emphasis lies on a good language. What is more it is related to the culture they are themselves coming from. If the mother tongue was very important, well developed and socially appreciated their consciousness and reflection over language is higher. The social class affiliation plays a role as well. But even those with very low education and cultural capital see the importance of language.

> Sociologists might say that I receive these language messages as class signals, that I associate the sounds of correctness with the social status of the speaker. In part, this is undoubtedly true. The class-linked notion that I transfer wholesale from Poland is that belonging to a "better" class of people is absolutely dependent on speaking "better" language. And in my situation especially, I know that language will be crucial instrument that I can overcome the stigma of my marginality, the weight of presumption against me, only if the reassuringly right sounds come out of my mouth (Hoffman 1989, 123).

For immigrants the awareness of language and culture is often connected with the social class and the level of education, the higher they are the stronger the link. Even among young researchers the awareness to be formed as academics is very high and connected with cultural codes and specific academic language both in the written and oral form.

Mead's theories of language and of role taking are closely interrelated to the way that selfhood emerges. He writes about it in such words: ÓI know of no other form of behaviour than the linguistic in which the individual is an object to himself" (Mead 1934, 142). An interesting characteristic is that while mind emerges out of language, language Óitself is possible because of the triadic relation on which the existence of meaning is based" stresses Mead (1934, 145). Language is also a part of the social act, and it contributes to it as being creative especially in a new situation, as it emerges from the reconstructive activity of individuals. That is why it is perfectly legitimate to study language as a part of social conduct in which both meaning and the self emerge. It is also possible to get insight into the process of learning by studying a language and its role in identity formation and change.

There are at least two features of language that Mead differentiates. First, it is characterised by temporality, even if we are born into a common language; we use it creatively by developing it. Language is not static, and is changed creatively by its users. Second, as language reveals thinking, both language and thought are intersubjective or social. It cannot develop without interaction or social act, nor without understanding or meaning we inscribed to it. It is interesting to study how language of academy changes, especially within minor European languages, both because of the influence of English, which brings a more informal style, as well as because of everyday life speech, which influences social science through qualitative research.

Mead's theory of expression echoes his view of the self because according to him language is intrinsically temporal and internally related to thought. When an individual learns a new language s/he gets a new soul, or a new identity, as s/he takes the attitudes of those who are using this particular language. This observation has pivotal consequences for forming new attitudes and identities for example among newcomers to the culture of a social group. What

is more, an individual will be unable to converse with those who belong to the community without reading its literature or without taking its peculiar attitudes. In this sense s/he becomes a different individual, thus it is impossible for a human to convey a language as a pure abstraction. Interesting examples can be seen in the statements that Polish immigrants give:

Teresa, who emigrated to Sweden with her family, and who come there with her professional competencies and work experience, talks about learning a new language:

> From the very beginning we were asked to take up an intensive language course. (...) I was trying to learn professional terminology on my own – I borrowed a book from the library, (...) I was trying to read page by page, guessing meaning, taking notes and making a sort of my own dictionary (Teresa, 4).
> We were living then at a Ótransfer" camp (...) We began learning with great enthusiasm and willingness. I remember we used to borrow a tape recorder to record every lesson (24).

Learning the language at the course is of course not to learn how to speak in everyday life with all the nuances, expression and cultural codes typical for a specific class or social group. She talks about it in the following way:

> We were taught Standard Swedish, while another language was unknown to us, so we couldn't understand slang at all. I can remember a funny event, when a friend (...) invited me to to the theatre, and that was a play about a workers' family. I couldn't understand a word. People were laughing, and I didn't know why. And suddenly, there is a scene when a TV-set is turned on in the play and there is a literary discussion on - it was supposed to be a parody of a sophisticated language. And that was the only moment in the play, which I could understand (Teresa, 29).

Another type of language is connected to the job or profession one is performing. Teresa has changed several times her jobs that required learning of professional language. That meant different kinds of languages, but also acting and behaving, learning cultural codes connecting to a specific profession. But she recalls that:

> The most difficult for me was to learn "office" (bureaucracy) language. There are no such expressions in the dictionary. I first thought I wouldn't need such language, but it turned out later that I had to learn it (Teresa, 28).

She also states how important it was to learn about the culture of the new country:

> As I had a lot of time - I was teaching only a few hours a week - I began to read Swedish literature. We started with thinner books, like Pär Lagerkvists *Gast hos verkligheten*. We just wanted to get acquainted with Swedish culture in that ways (Teresa, 32).

Thus, one is also engaged in conveying the life that lies behind the language of a given community. ÓAnd this result builds itself into relationship with the organised attitudes of the

individual who gets this language and inevitably brings about a readjustment of views" states Mead (1934, 167-68). This has profound consequences for different identity constructions and role taking in a rapidly changing world, and is therefore important for adult education research concerned with processes of learning and becoming.

Language according to Mead is more than a technical way of communication, it is very much a social and cultural phenomenon through which we express a way or a special style of acting in a significant world. To really appropriate a language means to understand it in all the situations and cultural contexts, which means 'to live the life of the language, to live the social process it expresses' (see Rosenthal, Bourgeois 1991, 142). Those who are able to do it do not have problems with finding themselves around different social situation and contexts. They can interact, understand and be understood as well. This brings us to Mead's theory of intersubjectivity.

Theory of Intersubjectivity

The source to human individuality and a self can be found, according to Mead, in communication between people, in their intersubjectivity. It is understood by him as in changing or changeable, as subjectivity in making. That is why von Wright emphasises that Mead's theory can be seen as an intersubjective point of departure for becoming human, for subjectivity construction/constituting or forming. Joas (1997, 14) develops from Mead's theory of intersubjectivity the concept of *practical intersubjectivity* that points towards Óa structure that arises and takes form in the joint activity of human subjects to achieve ends set by their life needs, a structure into which the corporeality of these subjects and external nature readily enter". Thus, Mead reconstructs linguistic intersubjectivity from Óthe structure of gestural communication" that is both linked closely to the body as well as grounded in cooperative action. In this way, according to Joas, Óthe atomization of individuals is eliminated" (ibid. 13).

Looking for the origin of reflexive thinking Mead leads us to the social situations that are understood as reciprocal processes of constructing meaning rather than the individual intentions that are coming from a particular mind. Thus, the social interaction inhabits a source of co-ordination conduct from which the reflexive thinking takes form. Mead's intersubjectivity in social situations is characterised by unpredictability, as people's involvement in social conduct and interaction is unique, and human conduct is characterised by constant changes. Thus each situation is unique and creative depending on what different actors contribute to it, and how it develops because of their interaction with each other. New meanings are constructed, or reconstructed and created. To predict what is going to happen is

impossible. Mead's contribution to the concept of intersubjectivity thus derives from identifying a shift from the predicted or possible to the unexpected.

Maria comes to Sweden invited by her daughter and after three days of being in the country she gets a job, an unqualified and heavy job in the food-and goods storage of the big super-market company. Experience with her employer, mostly because of her low language competencies, is very bad. She feels used and misused in her heavy job in which she has stayed for 17 years. From the beginning she expected to learn Swedish.

> And I couldn't get on the course, because it was impossible to walk 6 km every day. And to carry the books on your back. So much paper. My hands were aching. And besides my boss didn't like the idea of me attending the course, because there was so much work and he wanted me to work more. So I worked. And today I'm poor, because of my Swedish pronunciation and grammar, which is also difficult. So I speak badly, well, but (Maria, 12).
> I was happy I was finishing the job. Because it was a terrible job – so many hours a day. I didn't have any special qualification (Maria, 19).

Maria neither gets a course in Swedish nor in-job service. She is left on her own, not being able to communicate or understand what one needs from her. Her situation is difficult to imagine, but still there must be many in her situation. She was so much engaged in doing all things right that she missed her coffee brakes, in the end she was not expected to take them. Nobody was there to help her.

> And every time there was something new: new instruments, machines, computers. And I was not qualified, so I was terrible anxious and tried my best, but it was difficult. So when they had coffee, I used to practice myself. And they were laughing. Nobody showed me what to do. I did it myself. I learned it *myself*. (Maria, 19) Well, I just remember when I came to work for the first time they put me in front of a huge machine. And I was sweating all the time, thinking that perhaps I'm not doing my work properly. And the price had to be correct, because they were paying me for that, I couldn't make mistake. They gave me a list and I had to do it. Without any course, any school. And I simply,...nobody showed me how to do it. I don't know how I managed. Everybody was surprised. And I learned everything myself. And I never made a mistake. And there was so much stuff, I used to do several thousands kilograms a day (Maria, 20).

Maria, without being able to speak, communicates nevertheless and finds her way around by learning and doing her work, under the circumstances, quite well.

- **Between Two Cultures. Poles in Sweden**

The story of Maria is rather typical for other immigrants as well, bad knowledge of the country, its culture and language, and still a contribution to it's wealth by hard work and perfection. Maria is typically between the cultures, neither in the Polish nor in the Swedish.

And still the most acute problem of immigrants is to find one's own place in the new culture and country.

By collecting life stories we can get insight into the existential, psychological and social well being of adults; their struggles as individuals, and whole groups, to compose identities and biographies in a paradoxical late modern culture characterised by flux, frightening uncertainties and exposure to risks, but also new opportunities for self-definition (Bron, West 2000). This includes the idea of intentionality but also having socially defined roles and expectations. In the meeting points between these two processes, self-identity is developed and change is negotiated. Ewa Hoffman writes about the hard time when the new identity is imposed by others.

> Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. (Hoffman 1989, 105)

It is only when the actor herself/himself decides to change and re-write one's identity that this process is functioning.

> Perhaps it is in my misfittings that I fit. Perhaps a successful immigration is an exaggerated version of the native. From now on, I'll be made, like a mosaic, of fragments–and my consciousness of them. It is only in that observing consciousness that I remain, after all, an immigrant (Hoffman 1989, 164). ... I haven't escaped my past or my circumstances; they constrain me like a corset, making me stiffer, smaller. I haven't bloomed to that fullness of human condition in which only my particular traits–the good mold of my neck, say, or the crispness of my ironies–matter (198). ... It's time to roll down the scrim and see the world directly, as the world. I want to re-enter; through whatever Looking Glass will take me there, a state of ordinary reality (202). ... Now that I'm no longer a visitor, I can no longer ignore the terms of reality prevailing of the natives. I have to learn how to yield too much of my own ground that fills me with such a passionate energy of rage (205).

One of the results of my research that is both grounded in the data but also influenced by symbolic interactionism's analysis is the category that emerged from the stories of both Polish immigrants and PhD students. I called this category 'floating', that involved a basic uncertainty about self, identity, place and belonging. It includes a feeling of being fragmented, of not having a past, and not yet being able to form or plan a future (see, Bron, West 2000, 167). Humans need to move on and reconstruct biographically; they need to become more of a self while interacting with others. From such fragments, illusions and disillusions, a new whole is reorganised and created. Missing pieces and lack of any sense of authorship in life do not make us feeling happy (ibid.). Ewa Hoffman (1989), has captured this experience:

> Then, to retain my ground, my grounding, I pull away, and then, pulling away too far, an astronaut floating in an enormously lonely outer space, I know that I cannot sustain my sense of a separate reality forever, for after all, the only reality is a shared reality, situated within a common ground (Hoffman 1989, 195). ... I have been dislocated from my own centre of the world, and that world has been shifted away

> from my centre. There is no longer a straight axis anchoring my imagination; it begins to oscillate, and I rotate around it unsteadily (132).

Such situations may be typical for immigrants, but also for newcomers to the academic world, where both culture and language, as well as ways of conduct and meeting people, differ considerably from settings outside. This of course is not the only example: all social institutions create a specific way of being through their members. Informal learning and tacit knowledge is the phenomenon that can be investigated through biographies of people involved in social encounters. Teresa talks about her biographical learning in the following words.

> We must learn from the basics, the language national character, culture, customs, manners, formulating THOUGHTS. You could be satisfied with the language only, and there are some, who after 20 or 40 years couldn't learn that, but it means that they are forced to live in isolation, to live life in their own world. If you have a need of entering the community life, or actively participating in artistic, academic or professional life, you are required to learn all the time. (...). The fact of my immigration and all other circumstances and life situations, which resulted caused that I realised, I couldn't afford stagnation, either professional or any other. I have never intended to "assimilate " but wanted both to master the language and learn the culture and tradition of the country in which I have now lived almost 18 years. Thanks to the fact that I have been working in various communities and professions I had a chance and opportunity to learn the language and facts. But it required enormous effort and involvement, work, and I don't know what stimulated me to do so (Teresa, 20).

She takes all the opportunities which are at hand to be able to learn about the new country by being reflective and self-reflective but also open to new experiences, that she treats as challenges.

> I had learned a lot myself at that course and it gave me a lot of satisfaction. For example, I could learn the way in which Swedish women were thinking - women of various ages. And particularly essential for me was to notice the difference in their and my thinking. They represented different cultural background, they had been brought up in a different national history, so different from ours, where wars were forgotten long ago. They had also been brought up in a different religion (which I didn't know), and had different education, and so they had a different point of view on various problems. They felt and reacted in a different way, had different associations, and read other authors and knew and liked different works of art. So they enjoyed different things that I did. That situation and awareness of being different enabled me to see how I was thinking and feeling (Teresa, 35).

However, she discovers a limit in knowing more about a new culture:

> But yet, there is something you cannot learn. And this is mentality, or rather the way of thinking, of reacting. The background we have is so much different. And that is why we cannot fully understand the Swedes, and they cannot understand us. And it was just this inability of understanding that caused, or lead to various conflicts. And even now, when I know the reasons, I still subconsciously act so that my behaviour leads to conflicts. I am too sharp in expressing my judgements. I often use the word "must", "it must be so and so", I express directly what I think and I expect the same from people with whom I talk. Yes or no, and nothing ambiguous so characteristic to the Swedish people (Teresa, 37).

Nevertheless, it is still possible to reach even this level and be formed by the culture when it is understood more extensively and broad, thus changing our way of thinking, acting and perceiving the others and ourselves.

- **Becoming Homo Academicus**

There are two issues of interest when studying the way of young researchers to become academics. The first is to socialise to the role of a member of the research community, and the second is to become aware of the gender differences in the research community and especially to construct a female research identity.

Research students are newcomers to the community of university. For some the career concerns a very conscious decision and a process that follows, for others it is still an uncertain way that just happened as they were encouraged by their supervisors and tutors to continue. They are coming from different parts of Sweden and mostly from families without an academic background. But even if they grew up at a home at which parents were highly educated and professionals, nevertheless their habitus still might be different from the expectations of the scientific community[3]. Usually they bring with them a specific language of the area where they grew up. For twenty years or more dialects have been very much appreciated in Sweden and the instruction in school is not destroying them. To my surprise most of the young researchers I was interviewing did not use dialects. When asked they said that they learnt the standard language, i.e. the language one speaks in Uppsala, and especially at university. The reason they gave was that if you study at Uppsala you should use the language that is appropriate. Surely, using the standard Swedish is a crucial way of socialising and becoming a researcher. This happens usually automatically, as they do not want to stand out from the others. There is, however, not only pronunciation, but a specific way of using written and oral language which they have to acquire. They consciously work on their oral and written presentations.

Young researchers learn the academic language by participating in seminars, open disputations on PhD theses, and individually work with critical examinations of texts for the courses and for writing papers and theses. They are, however, not getting any whatsoever training in writing. The only way is by conforming to the dominate academic style at a given institution, or research group. The story of Johanna, that I presented before, is a good example of this process. There are, however, differences depending on the discipline one is studying. In humanities and social sciences researchers are very much depended on reading, and

writing, while for natural scientists short articles is the way of presenting research results as their main work takes place in laboratories. What is more, the latter produce their texts in English. There is also a big difference in working conditions. Whereas the latter work in research teams, and are very much depended on the collective work when getting information on what is going on in their field, the former, i.e. humanist and social scientists are working very much alone and individual achievements are evaluated. Another difference is the much less formalised way of working among natural scientists where female researchers are treated more as equals and valuable partners in the research process and discussion. But no matter what subject one is studying the main goal still is to become a self-confident and independent researcher. Paradoxically it is much more stressed among natural scientists who treat themselves more like students, and the whole process of writing a thesis is seen by them as getting an education. For humanists and social scientists the research community expects maturity as a researcher much earlier, sometimes already from the beginning.

One interesting result from the Uppsala project (Bron 1998) is that while more women were coming to research, there are still no female professors at the departments. To look for female models was just impossible, which created the situation of socialising to the male dominated conditions. This brings us to the next issue, i.e. to become aware of the gender differences in the research community and constructing female identity.

Coming as a young researcher to the department at Uppsala University one is confronted with the traditional gender roles. On the bottom of the hierarchy we can find both women and men as lecturers and sometimes even senior lecturers. But professor's positions are occupied by men. Especially in the humanistic disciplines male supervisors and researchers are the standard, and the seminars are very formalised. It seems as if one wanted to keep the status of the discipline. In natural sciences, even if there are also men in top positions, the climate is much more informal and the discussion at the seminars more connected to the topics than to the persons. In humanities professors have a different way of approaching and discussing with male than female researchers (see Bron 1995a). They also have different expectations depending on gender. However, we could notice through our research (both observations and interviews) that there is an awareness of gender differences among the new generation of researchers, including young male researchers, who want to change the pattern. In natural sciences the awareness is growing among female researchers who can also notice that the way of treating them is gender specific. Kristina directs her criticism towards a professor who has difficulties to see women as good as a male researcher.

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[3] The unwritten or tacit expectations include being an individualist and competitor.

This criticism Kristina directs not exactly personally to him, but to his generation. She refers to her experience from an oral examination when the professor examined four female students. He used very school like questions not taking women seriously, and using the pattern of teacher-pupil relation rather than researcher – researcher, that is typical for the examination of male students. The professor was more relaxed with male students treating them more or less as colleagues. The whole atmosphere of the examination was very formal and different form the research routines when women met their professor. This could be seen as a contradiction to the informal character of seminars and other meetings at the department, and keeping the old pattern of domination and gendered role differences in professor's acting.

One of the strategies female students at the department of social science use to counterbalance the formal and gendered seminars, is to organise themselves in small groups where the topics from their research are discussed in an informal way, and where they learn and practice how to present their results at the main seminars. The main seminars are running according to a ritual, where having one's own place to sit and the order of taking the floor are both steered according to a hierarchy and a culture of the department (who is talking when, and what is appropriate to say). In this hierarchy female researchers have a bottom position. The small group seminars are not attended by all female researchers. Those who meet there are themselves interested in women issues and feminism.

Socialisation of young researchers to traditional gendered roles happens not only because of the hierarchical and male dominant structure of academy. It has also much to do with the topics that are studied. In humanities and social sciences some of the topics are typical male and have a higher status than those chosen by women, as young researchers are testifying. An example can be studies on children literature or female writers which have lower status than the 'standard' literature. But this pattern is changing together with the feminism and post-modernism perspective in both humanities and social sciences.

There are also prejudice and wishful thinking that make the gendered role differences to stay longer than the experience tells. One example can be the difference in male and female style of research. This was a specific attitude that came out of the interviews where one of the natural science researchers stated that there is a profound difference of doing research depending of being a male or a female, that was not collaborated by others. The style in itself is very personal depending on the personality and not on the gender of the researcher. These two styles that were differentiated were: being very organised and careful in doing experiments and taking the notes during the process, against being chaotic, not organised and taking notes only afterwards.

From the Uppsala research we could conclude that most of the young researchers were conscious of the gender specific situation of their roles and they wanted to make some changes. Interestingly at the mostly male dominated departments the awareness was higher.

Conclusion

Biographies are useful or informative material that can give insights into how identities are changing and becoming. It is possible to have different identities, or several, at the same time, and cope with them accordingly in different social situations, family, work, being with friends. Because of changes in life, like in emigration or changing the career, where new culture, new language, and symbols as well as meanings are involved we can enrich and shape our lives again and again. To capture such processes is essential for understanding human conduct and becoming, but most of all, for adult educators, to capture the intersubjectivity of human learning.

The main question was how learning contributes to reflection over one's own roles, identities, etc. as well as to (re)construction of identity(ies). I hope we got some answers, even if it is only the beginning in exploring research material, that still needs in-depth analysis. The answers direct us to understand changes in identities in connection to language learning and especially learning a new culture.

Chambers (1994) points to the interesting idea about what happens when we undergo changes in which language plays a crucial role:

> Such a journey is open and incomplete, it involves a continual fabulation, an invention, a construction, in which there is no fixed identity or final destination. There is no final referent that exists outside our languages (Chambers 1994, 25).

Ewa Hoffman's experience fits perfectly to what this means while dealing with a language:

> I've become obsessed with words. I gather them, put them away like a squirrel saving nuts for winter, swallow them and hunger for more. If I take enough, then maybe I can incorporate the language, make it part of my psyche and my body. I will not leave an image unworded, will not let anything cross my mind till I find the right phrase to pin the shadow down (...) I can't live forever in a windy, unfurnished imagination; (...) I have to add a bottom to the language that I learned from the top (Hoffman, 216-217).

Viewed from Mead's perspective we are dealing with constructing and reconstructing or making and remaking identities, through interactions and language learning, as well as adjustment and readjustment to culture, sub-cultures and their symbols, all in the process of social interaction and within a range of social institutions. The stories people tell are temporal products, which show that the individual life is never ending and always open to new experiences and changes, often unexpected, as are identities and social roles. This makes each

life unique and dynamic, and yet within the same culture and language so similar that it enables us to understand each other and to change the others and ourselves. As Denzin (1989) writes:

> All stories and narratives are temporal products. They are either tales or stories of time, or stories about time (Ricoeur) ... all stories deal with temporal order of events, some events being anterior to or simultaneous with other events, while some are posterior, or come after events (Denzin 1989, 185).

According to Mead Óthe memories of the past self are memories as essentially related to, and emanating from, a present self" (Rosenthal, Bourgeois 1991, 121). Thus, again the temporality of the self and of the biography is emphasised and has profound consequences for analysing and understanding the story told.

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